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ABSTRACT

After a school district is desegregated, what factors determine whether the individual school becomes a harmonious entity with full acceptance of both races, or simply another resegregated school where blacks and whites coexist uneasily? This study attempts to demonstrate that in a school's alteration from segregation to desegregation, the administrative position most centrally involved in the institionalization of this social change is its chief administrative officer--the public school principal. From an exploratory pilot study of 17 principals and assistant principals conducted in York County, Va., in the spring and summer of 1969, a questionnaire was developed to probe three dimensions of the principal's role in desegregation. During the winter of 1970, a statewide questionnaire survey of all principals of Virginia high schools, junior highs, and combined schools was conducted. Of the 481 questionnaires mailed, 312 were returned in a manner acceptable for survey data. Findings are grouped in three areas: the principal's influence in the community, the principal as change agent in the school, and the principal's power status in the school system. These findings lead to the conclusion that desegregation is redefining the role of the principal. (Author/JM)

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INTRODUCTION

An era of school desegregation has moved the public school from a semi-closed system into the mainstream of one of the most critical social issues of our time. To study the desegregated school is to sample the winds of social change in America today.

Desegregation (i.e., the legal decision to eliminate a dual school structure and establish a unitary one) initiates a process of social change. Social change, to be lasting, must be bureaucratically implemented in local institutions. (Witness the lags since the '54 Supreme Court decision). This implementation of equality of educational opportunity for both blacks and whites moves individuals very quickly from the ideological to the personal level when the local school to which one is related as student, teacher, administrator, patron or taxpayer is desegregated.

Research Inquiry. After a school district is desegregated, what factors determine whether the individual school becomes a harmonious entity with full acceptance of both races, or simply

another resegregated school where blacks and whites shift uneasily in their seats? The sociology of school desegregation must deal with this question. After four years of observing the differences in desegregated schools within the same district and searching for explanations of the differences, this investigator narrowed the research inquiry to a study of the structure and function of the school district's administrative hierarchy.

Centrality of the Principal. We will demonstrate in this paper that: In a school's alteration from segregation to desegregation, the administrative position most centrally involved in the institutionalization of this social change is its chief administrative officer - the public school principal. In a segregated school, the principal functions in a semi-closed system in which he is partially isolated from the stresses and strains of social civil rights conflicts. In a desegregated school, he is on the cutting edge of social change. As he goes about his daily responsibilities, the principal consistently functions closer to the operational consequences of school desegregation than any other individual in the administrative hierarchy of the school district.

How the principal performs as the internal change agent in the individual school determines whether the process becomes one of desegregation/integration, or desegregation/resegregation. The integrated school is characterized by openness to changing values, attitudes and feelings. The resegregated school is characterized by conformity, rigidity and conflict. (Desegregation is used to

designate the legal decision by a school district to eliminate a dual school structure. Integration denotes racial mutuality. Resegregation designates racially segregated groups under one roof).

The principal of the desegregated school finds himself faced constantly with political, social and socioeconomic problems that he did not experience as principal of a segregated school, black or white. Local customs of discrimination, federal requirements of civil rights compliance, and personal prejudices and hostilities of both races make school desegregation a predictable conflictual encounter. How the principal manipulates this conflict has enormous influence on the long-range acceptance or rejection of integration in the school and community. His centrality in this process brings the position of principalship into focus as the locus of change in school desegregation.

"Forgotten Man." Oddly enough, the public school principal has been the object of very little research in school desegregation. Research in the field has concentrated on the student-teacher syndrome -- the effects of black/white ratios -- family and peer influences -- power structure and community, (e.g., Equality of Educational Opportunity (1966); Racial Isolation in the Public Schools (1967); Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (1968); The Politics of School Desegregation (1968).)

Weinberg evaluates more than 200 research projects on school desegregation in Desegregation Research: An Appraisal (1968). Not

one of these research inquiries is primarily concerned with the administrative role of the public school principal in school desegregation. Director of the Florida School Desegregation Center, Dr. M. J. Stolee, told this investigator in 1968, " . . . the principal has been the forgotten man throughout the whole process." (Personal letter).

When this study was initiated, the investigator found during the course of the pilot study that the situation facing principals of desegregated schools in general is that of almost overwhelming problems of human relations, lack of relevancy of curriculum to needs of subgroups, conflicts and pressures from within the school and from outside sources. He has experienced a surge of additional responsibility without a significant increase in his power-status in the school system, and without a clear definition of his position. He recognizes that community support of desegregation is tenuous and he sees little evidence of official support through state educational channels.

Pilot Study and Survey. From the exploratory pilot study of 17 principals and assistant principals conducted in York County, Virginia, in the spring and summer of 1969, a questionnaire was developed to probe three dimensions of the principal's role in desegregation. These are:

(1) His influence in the community.
(2) His change agent function in the local school.
(3) His power-status in the school system or district.

During the winter of 1970, a statewide questionnaire survey of all principals of Virginia high schools, junior highs, and combined schools was conducted. Of the 481 questionnaires mailed, 326 or 67.8 percent were returned. Fourteen of these were rejected on basis of insufficient answers, and 312 were accepted for survey data. They are drawn from all relevant sections of the research population, both geographically and by stage of civil rights compliance. Respondents represented 123 of the 134 school districts in the state, leaving 11 districts with only a total of 17 schools in them not represented in the survey. Of these 11 districts, four were civil rights compliance, four in a stage of compliance, and three under court order. One of these 11 districts is a suburban area, one a city, and the balance rural.

One hundred and sixty-five of the 312 principals used in the survey data were principals of schools with more than a five percent racial mixture. The other 147 individuals were principals of nearly all black schools (less than five percent racial mixture). Eighty-two percent of the principals were white, 18 percent black. Thirty-six percent of the principals were in rural communities, 18 percent in suburban, 15 percent in small towns, 11 percent in cities, and 20 percent in metropolitan areas. Seventy-two percent of the principals were from school districts in some stage of civil rights compliance, 26 percent from districts under court order, and two percent of the principals from school districts whose funds had been cut off for non-compliance.

FINDINGS

Interesting findings of survey data are grouped in the three areas of questioning: 1) The principal's influence in the community, 2) the principal as change agent in the school, and 3) the principal's power status in the school system. These findings lead to the conclusion that desegregation is redefining the role of the principal.

Community influence. The locally supported and controlled segregated school was isolated from national, social, and political conflicts, frequently not regarded as part of the "real world." On the other hand, the desegregated public school is local evidence of the national civil rights movement. The increase of Federal funding has forced the administration from a local to a national orientation. In this setting, the principal of the desegregated school is the administrative head of a contained unit of one of the most sensitive social issues of the day. While the principal of a desegregated school has obviously lost some of the prestige which formerly surrounded the education mystique, his views have taken on new authority concerning social issues.

In a discussion of the community and desegregation, it is essential to know the communities in which the racially-mixed schools are located. Table 1 gives this data. There are 107 schools in rural communities in this survey. They are represented at every level of racial mixture, with the most even

distribution among the categories of more than five percent racial mixture of any community. The suburban communities are not represented by any predominantly black schools, and only two suburban schools have an almost equal black/white ratio of students. The same trend is seen in the small towns, with only three schools in the below 49 percent white categories. Small cities have nine nearly all-black schools, the lowest number of nearly all-white schools, three; and 22 schools from 50-95 percent white. Metropolitan areas tend to have fewer schools with a nearly equal black/white ratio, and more polarization of nearly all-black and nearly all-white schools.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF RACIALLY MIXED SCHOOLS IN SURVEY
ACCORDING TO COMMUNITY SIZE

Percent White Students in School	Rural	Suburb	Town	City	Metro	Total Number
Less than 5% white	12	0	1	9	14	36
5-49% white	14	0	2	0	7	23
50-65% white	18	2	7	2	7	36
66-95% white	36	32	18	20	20	126
96-100% white	27	22	18	3	12	82
Total number	107	56	46	34	60	303

Eighty-six percent of the principals represented in the data consider that they are very influential in setting the tone of acceptance of desegregation in the community with no significant variation by community size. Seventy-four percent of the principals in the survey

feel that schools should lead the community in social change. This was defined in the question as initiating an attitude of racial equality in a community. The range of responses according to community size is found in the following table.

TABLE 2

RELATIONSHIP OF SCHOOL TO COMMUNITY
IN SOCIAL CHANGE
ACCORDING TO COMMUNITY SIZE
BY PERCENTAGES

	Rural	Town	Suburb	City	Metro	All Schools
Schools should lead	83	60	65	66	82	
Schools should follow	17	40	35	34	18	
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
	(N=109)	(N=46)	(N=55)	(N=35)	(N=61)	(N=306)

The power structure of the small town gives an insight into the hesitancy of the small town principal to initiate social change. One small town principal responding in the survey indicated he was the fifth principal of that school in five years, but "I know how to keep my job," he said. He acknowledged running a "behind the times" school in which he had no qualms about "bending the law" to keep the patrons happy. "In a place like this," he said, "you expect community control. If parents get unhappy, they go downtown to the local school board member who is the banker and complain. They don't come to me."

Could the reluctance of the suburban principal to be aggressive in social change be a latent consequence of the affluent society that has moved to the suburbs to escape racial problems? Most of the cities in the survey appear to be large towns, with the likelihood of the same type of centralized mono power structure.

The diversity of power in the metropolitan areas places the school administrator, and particularly the superintendent, in the strategic position to use pressure groups rather than to take orders. The superintendent clearly operates under legal mandate in the desegregation of schools. He has the flexibility to voice agreement with local conservative leaders, but under pressure from court and federal guidelines, allow principals of the individual schools the autonomy they need to bring about a positive integration of the school center.

The interesting figure in Table 2 is the attitude of rural Virginia principals that schools should lead the community in social change. During the very period in which city and suburban schools have been becoming more segregated, not only by race, but by socioeconomic factors created by housing patterns, rural communities are abandoning neighborhood schools. The educational value of the consolidated school, and the economic advantages of larger school districts are undoubtedly explanatory factors in this table.

Table 3 illustrated the opposite ends of the continuum of desegregated schools. The question was asked, "How do you think the community as a whole has responded to desegregation?" Principals of the nearly all white schools indicate the community has responded favorably. Principals of the nearly all black schools say the community has responded unfavorably.

TABLE 3

COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO DESEGREGATION
ACCORDING TO THE LEVEL OF RACIAL MIXTURE IN THE SCHOOL
BY PERCENTAGES

	Less than 5% white	5-49% white	50-65% white	66-95% white	96-100% white	All Schools
Favorable	9	39	41	43	61	
Unfavorable	91	61	59	57	39	
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(N=33)	(N=23)	(N=34)	(N=124)	(N=67)	(N=281)

The most unexpected data in the entire survey came from the prediction of community attitudes toward integration in the next five years. An over-all negative response of 54 percent was recorded, with these principals feeling community reactions will become less favorable. However, those principals in the thick of the issue are the most hopeful. Principals of schools with a high level of racial mixture are the most optimistic, and the predominantly white school principals are the most pessimistic.

TABLE 4

PRINCIPAL'S PREDICTION OF COMMUNITY'S FUTURE ATTITUDE
TOWARD DESEGREGATION ACCORDING TO LEVEL OF RACIAL MIXTURE IN SCHOOL
BY PERCENTAGES

	Less than 5% white	5-49% white	50-65% white	66-95% white	96-100% white	All Schools
More favorable	50	74	75	38	35	
Less favorable	50	26	25	62	65	
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(N=34)	(N=23)	(N=36)	(N=125)	(N=72)	(N=290)

It is highly possible that the consequences of desegregation compel a principal to become more objective. The following quotation from one of the principals illustrates this:

> Desegregation forces you to develop a philosophy of education in a way that segregated schools never did. The usual things just don't work. If I were perfectly honest, I would still prefer being principal of a segregated school. At the same time, I know that if I had never been forced to look at any culture but middle-class white children, I would never have changed.

These same questions of community attitudes are in the following tables, this time controlling for community size. While the metropolitan principal reported the most negative response to desegregation (see Table 5), he predicts the most positive future community attitudes (Table 6). On the other hand, the suburban principal reported the most favorable response to desegregation, but the most unfavorable future attitude.

TABLE 5

COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO DESEGREGATION
ACCORDING TO COMMUNITY SIZE
BY PERCENTAGES

	Rural	Town	Suburb	City	Metro	All Schools
Favorable	41	51	62	35	27	
Unfavorable	59	49	38	65	73	
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
	(N=103)	(N=39)	(N=55)	(N=34)	(N=59)	(N=290)

TABLE 6

PRINCIPAL'S PREDICTION OF COMMUNITY'S FUTURE ATTITUDE
TOWARD DESEGREGATION
ACCORDING TO COMMUNITY SIZE
BY PERCENTAGES

	Rural	Town	Suburb	City	Metro	All Schools
More favorable	50	46	36	41	53	
Less favorable	50	54	64	59	47	
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
	(N=109)	(N=41)	(N=56)	(N=34)	(N=59)	(N=299)

Change Agent in School. Questions relating to the internal relationships in the school were directed toward measuring the principals' ability to develop group synergy among the subgroups that composed the school population. The principal is in the administrative position to synchronize the diverse subgroups, and handle conflict creatively.

As the primary internal change agent, the principal is no longer the "principal teacher," but an executive. He needs knowledge of social structure, political power, and human interaction in order to link subgroups in the school to the educational process in a positive manner. Decisions arrived at by group synthesis are more relevant to the environment of the desegregated school than hierarchial decision-making. Effective problem-solving in the desegregated school takes place as close as possible to the primary source of information in order to use realistically the skills and competencies of school groups.

Interestingly enough, the following table shows that the higher level of racial mixture, the more likely the principal is to use school groups (both students and teachers) as his primary reference group. The question asked here was, "When you want to get changes

made that will further integration (attitude of equality) in the school, whom (what source) do you first have to consult?"

TABLE 7

PRINCIPAL'S PRIMARY REFERENCE GROUP
ACCORDING TO LEVEL OF RACIAL MIXTURE
BY PERCENTAGES

	Less than 5% white	5-49% white	50-65% white	66-95% white	96-100% white	All Schools
School groups	17	47	54	49	39	
Administrative hierarchy	65	41	28	28	32	
Parents	18	12	18	23	29	
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
	(N=34)	(N=17)	(N=28)	(N=100)	(N=62)	(N=241)

The development of group goals through group action is called creative manipulation. To measure this technique, the following question was asked:

> Some principals say that in order to bring about social change in schools, in the formative stages they maneuver back and forth between faculty and student groups, sampling reactions and attitudes. This technique leaves them free to move in the direction most likely to be accepted by all sub-groups. To what extent do you use this strategy in changes involving integration?

The principals were asked the extent to which they use this strategy in changes involving integration. Coordination as a continuing process is inherent in creative manipulation. Table 8 shows that principals most likely to use this technique are those with high levels of racial mixture in the school population.

TABLE 8

PRINCIPAL'S USE OF CREATIVE MANIPULATION
ACCORDING TO LEVEL OF RACIAL MIXTURE
BY PERCENTAGES

	Less than 5% white	5-49% white	50-65% white	66-95% white	96-100% white	All Schools
Use technique	43	61	54	43	39	
Do not use technique	57	39	46	57	61	
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(N=30)	(N=23)	(N=35)	(N=122)	(N=70)	(N=280)

The data included in the following table was substantiated in interviews with selected principals who shared some of these insights. To measure sensitivity, the open-ended question was asked: "How do you become aware of potential trouble areas in the school, that is, how do you pick up cues that alert you to brewing difficulty?" A multiplicity of answers included being alerted by the coaches from conversations he overhears in the shower to being informed by key teachers and students. All types of informants were grouped in one category. Other cues principals recorded -- such as change in noise level in the lunchroom, social distance of students who were usually friendly, tempo changes in the halls -- were all grouped under observations.

In a segregated neighborhood school, the values and characteristics of the student body and faculty are not dissimilar. With a bringing together of blacks and whites, the principal finds it more necessary to depend on his own evaluation of the situation rather than the interpretaions of others. He learns that he must look beyond the

immediate conflict for explanations. It is precisely at the point of feedback from the school groups that the job of the principal becomes the most sensitive position in the administrative hierarchy of the school system.

Is the child "impossible and disrespectful," or is the teacher provoking him by forcing conformity with her own definition of the situation? Was a student election "rigged" or just poorly planned? The principal's mind is filled with dilemmas of human relations in a desegregated setting. The data in Table 9 show that the principals of schools with higher levels of racial mixture are more likely to develop their own sensitivity to the situation than in predominantly white or black schools. Sensitivity was tested by discovering how the principals become aware of potential trouble, or pick up cues that alert them to difficulty.

TABLE 9

PRINCIPAL'S SENSITIVITY TO MOOD OF SCHOOL
ACCORDING TO LEVEL OF RACIAL MIXTURE
BY PERCENTAGES

	Less than 5% white	5-49% white	50-65% white	66-95% white	96-100% white	All Schools
Observation	32	55	55	41	24	
Informants	68	45	45	59	76	
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
	(N=25)	(N=22)	(N=29)	(N=102)	(N=54)	(N=232)

Power-status in the school system. The principal of the segregated school functions as a "plant manager" and instructional leader of the school, with little feedback to the central office on policy decisions other than matters pertaining to instruction. The segregated school system usually operated with a clearly defined chain of command in organizational structure.

With national attention focused on desegregated schools, the principal is a primary feedback resource for the superintendent who is more insulated from the day to day operation. The principal is not often used as a member of the decision-making team of the larger school systems, but evidence shows that he is used more frequently as a consultant and resource when the school district is under court order or funds cut off for noncompliance. The question regarding frequency with which the superintendent or one of his administrative assistants discuss problems or policies with the principal that affect the entire school system measured inclusion in the informal organizational structure of the school district. Results recorded in Table 10 clearly indicate an increase in the principal's power-status in the school district that is not in compliance.

TABLE 10

PRINCIPAL'S ACCESS TO INFORMAL ORGANIZATION OF SCHOOL SYSTEM ACCORDING TO LEGAL STAGE OF DESEGREGATION BY PERCENTAGES

	Compli-ance	Court Order	Volun. Deseg.	Accept. Plan	Adm. Stage	Funds Cut Off	All Schools
Included	47	69	58	53	60	80	
Excluded	53	31	42	47	40	20	
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
	(N=109)	(N=80)	(N=26)	(N=47)	(N=37)	(N=5)	(N=304)

This investigator maintains that the principal's effectiveness as an internal change agent in the desegregation/integration process will not be sustained unless he is able to gain power-status in the school system. The principal has been placed in the organizational position in which he must function as change agent, but little data in this study indicate that this has been officially recognized in the school districts. Evidence suggests a lag between delegated responsibility for integration and the power to actuate it. Through a scale of decision-making, it was determined the level at which the principal functions as part of the decision-making team in his school district. The overall participation is low, but Table 11 shows that the highest level of involvement in systemwide decision-making is in those schools with a high level of racial mixture.

TABLE 11

PRINCIPAL'S LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT IN SYSTEMWIDE DECISION-MAKING ACCORDING TO LEVEL OF RACIAL MIXTURE, BY PERCENTAGES

	Less than 5% white	5-49% white	50-65% white	66-95% white	96-100% white	All Schools
High	23	44	44	26	27	
Low	77	56	56	74	73	
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
	(N=35)	(N=23)	(N=36)	(N=125)	(N=78)	(N=297)

The participation of principals in policy decisions directly relating to desegregation as listed by the Civil Rights Guidelines were used as the crieria for actual participation in decision-making. These dealt with

strategies for civil rights compliance, zoning, and elimination and prevention of discrimination.

The impact of desegregation on the principal's power-status is documented in Table 12. The principal of the school with high levels of racial mixture is more likely to be involved in policy decisions than at lower ratios of bi-racial population. This power-status variable clearly indicates that desegregation is redefining the position of the principal, with the racial composition of the individual school determining the degree of involvement. He is still essentially isolated from the decision-making level of the school system, and is not centrally involved in long-range planning. This investigator takes the position that his power to effect change of lasting significance in the desegregation/integration process is directly related to his power-status in the school district.

TABLE 12

PRINCIPAL'S PARTICIPATION IN ACTUAL DECISIONS AT THE POLICY LEVEL ACCORDING TO LEVEL OF RACIAL MIXTURE, BY PERCENTAGES

	Less than 5% white	5-49% white	50-65% white	66-95% white	96-100% white	All Schools
Policy	31	48	39	23	26	
Not Policy	69	52	61	77	74	
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
	(N=36)	(N=23)	(N=36)	(N=125)	(N=81)	(N=301)

Findings show that:

(1) The rural and metropolitan principals are more aggressive in social change than the suburban, small town or small city principals.

(2) The most favorable response to desegregation has been from the suburban communities, and from those schools with less than five percent black students enrolled. The most unfavorable has been from metropolitan areas, and from predominantly black schools (those with less than five percent white students enrolled.)

(3) The principal of the nearly equal black/white ratio school is more optimistic about the future of desegregation than at any other level of racial mixture. On the other hand, the principal of the suburban school is the most pessimistic.

(4) The more nearly a school approaches an equal black/white ratio of students, the more likely the principal is to consult school groups as his primary reference groups for change.

(5) Black subgroups are more likely to achieve equal status with white subgroups in the principal's cognizance of their needs and goals in the school that is composed of no more than sixty-five percent white students.

(6) The principal of the school that has at least a five percent racial mixture is more sensitive to the mood of the school than the principal of a predominantly black or white school; he is most likely to develop his own sensitivity to the tenor of the school at the nearly equal black/white ratio.

(7) Principals of schools in districts in which Federal funds have been cut off for non-compliance, or those districts under Court Order, are more likely to be a part of the informal organization of the system and used as consultants on policy decision by the administrative hierarchy.

(8) Principals of schools with a racial mixture of between five and sixty-five percent white are more likely to be involved in major systemwide decisions than any other principals.

(9) Principals of these same schools are more likely to have participated in major systemwide decisions directly related to desegregation than any other principals.

Next Step. This introductory, exploratory study of the sociology of school desegregation, examined from the point of view of the principal as change agent in school desegregation gives a direction to the next stage of exploration and research. The next step is to develop a model of a change agent principal from these data and test it against those principals represented in this survey who more nearly responded to the questionnaire in accordance with the model. From this a sample could be drawn and a field study made of a selected number of these principals, with evaluation from students, faculty, superintendent and community of his administrative actions in desegregation. A testable model of a change agent principal in the process from desegregation to integration could then be developed.

As the consolidation of school districts continues and the organizations become more complex; and as state and federal funding further remove schools from local control, the importance of the principal becomes more crucial. If racial integration does not take place in the public school, there is no other institution organized to cope with it. School desegregation, as the social change process, is redefining the position of the principalship to that of an executive rather than as an instructional position.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion to be drawn from these data is that the more nearly a school approaches an equal black/white ratio of students, the more problem-solving is forced to take place as close as possible to the level of operational consequences of policy enactment. (The level of operational consequences is at the point of primary sources of information of these consequences.) This places the principal and the school groups, including students and faculty, in new positions of power in the public school system. Because the individual school is "where the action is," desegregation will eventually result in a lessening of the power of the superintendent and the school board, and increase the change agent position of the principal.